

FBIS TRENDS
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USSR-Iran

Moscow Drops Clandestine Radio, Sustains Criticism of Tehran

The Soviet Union recently discontinued its clandestine radio broadcasts to Iran, but this does not appear to represent a significant change in Soviet treatment of Tehran. The clandestine radio was replaced promptly with equally critical broadcasts to Iran by a station explicitly acknowledged to be of Soviet origin.

The National Voice of Iran (NVOI), which had been broadcasting from Baku in Soviet Azerbaydzhan since 1959, went off the air in mid-September. At the end of September FBIS first monitored radio programs in Persian and Azeri--the languages used by NVOI--from Moscow's Radio Peace and Progress (RPP), which broadcasts in about a dozen other languages and claims to speak for Soviet "public organizations." Although different in format, the new broadcasts were clearly replacements for NVOI; indeed, FBIS monitors report that some of the RPP announcers are NVOI veterans.

Moscow's replacement of NVOI with RPP broadcasts could be related to doubts about the effectiveness of NVOI. The new RPP broadcasts appear designed to provide Moscow with a more varied and attractive format from which to comment on Iran. While NVOI only carried commentary--mostly on Iranian domestic and foreign policies--the new RPP broadcasts, like RPP broadcasts in other languages and like Moscow's official Persian-language service, carry international and Soviet domestic news, features, music, and commentary on regional issues and international topics, as well as commentaries on Iranian affairs and policies. (Whatever Moscow's motives in dropping NVOI, this step was not part of a decision to end all clandestine broadcasting; Moscow continues to beam clandestine broadcasts at China on Radio Ba Yi.)

Continued Stridency The dropping of NVOI and the initiation of RPP broadcasts to Iran has not resulted in a basic change in the tone of Soviet commentary on Iran. NVOI had been consistently, stridently critical of the Khomeyni regime in recent years, regularly attacking Ayatollah Khomeyni personally in its programs. The new RPP broadcasts

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have shown no signs of retreat from NVOI's approach. For example, a 21 October RPP broadcast accused the "ruling reactionaries" in Tehran of using Iranian youth as cannon fodder in the war against Iraq, and another broadcast, carried on 16 November and attributed to the outlawed communist Tudeh party, attacked the "bloodthirsty dictatorship in the hands of one person and his closest associates" and condemned the regime for implementing a whole series of repressive practices, including executions, torture, and the suppression of women and national and religious minorities.

Similarly, the treatment accorded Iran in official Soviet media, such as the government daily Izvestiya and Radio Moscow's Persian service, while generally more restrained than NVOI, has also shown no sign of diminished criticism. For example, a 2 December Izvestiya article attacked Iran's "ruling circles" for allegedly colluding with the United States and other "imperialist" forces to arm the Afghan rebels and for authorizing direct Iranian military involvement in Afghanistan. Izvestiya also criticized Khomeyni's hand-picked successor Ayatollah Montazeri by name for publicly "attempting to distort the intent" of Moscow's reputed withdrawal of Soviet regiments from Afghanistan in October. (In a 4 November speech, reported by Tehran radio on 5 November, Montazeri accused the USSR of "falsely claiming to be leaving" Afghanistan.)

The continued sharp attacks on the Khomeyni leadership reflect the severe strains in Soviet-Iranian relations since the early 1980's. However, there have been some signs of improved ties, especially in the economic sphere, and Soviet media reported on 10 December that Konstantin Katushev, chairman of the State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations, held talks with Iranian Government officials in Tehran on a number of bilateral issues on that date. During Katushev's visit the Iranians have both welcomed prospects for expanded ties and scolded the Soviets for their role in Iraq and Afghanistan. (U/FOUO)